DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 347 935 HE 025 698

AUTHOR Bayley, Linda J.
TITLE The Role of Women's Studies in Fostering Women's Educational and Career Prestige Aspirations.
PUB DATE 20 Apr 92
NOTE 12p.; For a related document, see HE 025 699.
PUB TYPE Reports - General (140)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Achievement; Achievement Need; *Aspiration; *Black Students; *Career Choice; College Freshmen; College Students; Comparative Analysis; Females; Goal Orientation; Higher Education; Longitudinal Studies; Multivariate Analysis; Racial Differences; Sex Differences; *Student Educational Objectives; *White Students; *Womens Studies

ABSTRACT

This paper presents a study that investigated the significant differences between black (n=157) and white (n=1,307) women's aspirations relative to their participation in Women's Studies. The status of women students' career and educational aspirations was assessed upon college entry and again 4 years later. Students were asked to report: (1) the highest formal academic degree they plan to acquire; and (2) their top career choice from a list of 44 career and occupational fields. It was found that participation in Women's Studies coursework significantly impacted occupational prestige aspirations differentially by race. Multivariate analyses for the career prestige measure indicated that there is a strong interaction effect for career prestige by race and by participation in Women's Studies Coursework; black women participants made substantial gains over other groups in the study, while the occupational aspirations of black non-participants declined. White women participants entered college with higher prestige aspirations than white non-participants. There was no significant difference in aspirational decline over college between participants and non-participants. Contains 32 references. (GLR)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Linda J. Bayley
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

THE ROLE OF WOMEN'S STUDIES IN FOSTERING WOMEN'S EDUCATIONAL AND CAREER PRESTIGE ASPIRATIONS

ED347935

Linda J. Bayley
Graduate School of Education
University of California, Los Angeles

Much empirical research has focused upon the aspirational choices of men, however, relatively few studies have included women and fewer still have studied primarily women. With economic shifts in the last several decades accompanying women's changing role, women's economic, and social responsibilities have expanded dramatically. In a democratic society, the concept of "social mobility", the opportunity to move from one societal class or position to another through education and personal effort is a fundamental belief. It is, therefore, important to observe women's ability or inability to attain greater status in conjunction with appropriate education, effort and expanded social responsibilities.

Research in the late 1960s and early 1970s indicated that generally women who persisted in college, unlike men, reduced their career aspirations, or maintained their original, comparatively low intentions. They moved from relatively high prestige aspirations (e.g. doctor, lawyer, engineer) to lower prestige "women's" aspirations (nurse, social worker, paraprofessional)[1]. In the mid-seventies, when Women's Studies Programs were instituted in colleges across the country, women's aspirations were found to increase (Zuckerman, 1980; Baruch, Barnett & Rivers, 1983).

An important theory underlying the institution of Women's Studies programs in colleges was set forth by Kuhn (1962). He noted that paradigms - basic assumptions about how the world works - shape societal institutions, in this case, education. Thus, when the

[1] Prestige refers to the deference and entitlement accorded occupational roles, and thus, the power and privilege exercised by incumbents of these roles (Shils, 1968).

HE025 698

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

societal experience of a repressed group is made explicit, it becomes possible, at least in theory, to hold a traditional explanatory system accountable for curriculum and support services previously unavailable. Tangible evidence of the results of this process can be observed by noting the proliferation of Women's Studies programs across the country. The process that supported the development of Women's Studies might also be expected to enhance women's willingness to set higher aspirational goals in college. The objective of this study is to describe significant differences between black and white women's aspirations relative to their participation in the unique college experience of Women's Studies.

Legal support for educational equity and female enrollment outcomes

Important legislation passed to give impetus to women's social mobility includes: (1) Title IX of the 1972 Education Amendments which prohibits sex discrimination in educational institutions receiving federal financial assistance; and (2) the Women's Educational Equity Act, passed in 1974, authorizing federal grants for research, development and other activities to promote educational equity for women and girls. These programs have dramatically increased the number of women attending postsecondary institutions (see Table 1.1). In the ten years between 1969 and 1987, the percentage of women attending institutions of higher education increased from 40% to 51% (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, "Fall Enrollment in Institutions of Higher Education", prepared April, 1989).

Table 1.1
Percent female student enrollment, 1959-1987, in coeducational institutions.

Year	Female Students
1959	35.0
1969	40.1
1979	48.4
1987	51.1

Source: U.S. Dept. of Education, 1989.

Education and Women's Studies

Educators suggested that a key to correcting many sex-related inequalities may be a better grasp of the development and significance of gender differences and the role of women in society (Howe, 1983; Chamberlain, 1988; Janeway, 1975; Stimpson, 1986; Sarbin in the Handbook of Social Psychology, 1954, p. 255). With such knowledge, women would be better prepared to make educational and career choices more consistent with their ability and less related to traditional role stereotypes (Henley & Bartle, 1987). In fact, recent research corroborates this notion. In a paper submitted for publication (1990), Henley and Bartle discuss key findings in relation to graduates of a women's studies certificate program. Strong, positive impacts were found in the areas of role development, careers and life experiences. Thus, the process that supported the development of Women's Studies may also enhance women's willingness to set higher aspirational goals and to attempt the negotiation process inherent in the attainment of higher status societal positions.

As academia begins to evaluate the impact of Women's Studies experiences upon the lives and life choices of college graduates, certain themes emerge. In many cases, this coursework represents a small portion of the total college experience. However, Women's Studies courses provide an opportunity for women attending coed colleges to experience female role models and a portion of the support that women attending women's colleges have traditionally experienced. It is well known that women attending women's colleges are twice as likely to graduate and pursue higher prestige careers than women attending coeducational colleges and universities (Tidball, 1980).

The purpose of this study is to discover whether and to what extent the career prestige and/or educational aspirations of white and black women interact with their participation in Women's Studies Coursework. Specifically, the questions to be answered are: 1) Does participation in Women's Studies Coursework affect the occupational and/or educational

aspirations of college women? and, 2) Is this effect differentiated by race/ethnicity? Since college is the time when students are socialized into adult roles, the college experience has been noted to be a very significant period during which to observe for aspirational change (Pascarella, 1984).

METHOD

The status of women students' career and educational aspirations was assessed upon college entry and again four years later. Students were asked to report: a) the highest formal academic degree they plan to acquire, and b) their top career choice from a list of 44 career and occupational fields. Based upon their career choice, students were assigned prestige scores based upon the work of Siegel (1971) at the National Opinion Research Center (NORC).

Student socioeconomic status (SES) was controlled by matching the statistical mean for SES by race. SES represents a composite factor including father's career prestige, mother's educational attainment and family income. The means for father's career and family income were higher in the case of white women students while mother's education was significantly higher in the case of black women students.

After controlling for SES, longitudinal changes in the aspirations of individual freshmen (freshmen to senior changes) were assessed using a repeated measures multivariate analysis of variance (Stevens, 1986). Educational aspiration and career prestige aspiration were the repeated measures collected at two points in time, 1985 and 1989. Race and participation in Women's Studies coursework were the between-subjects grouping factors. This design was applied to a longitudinal sample of women in coeducational colleges, in 1985 and 1989.

DATA SOURCE AND PROCEDURES

The 1985-89 Cooperative Institutional Research Program (Hurtado, Astin, Korn and Dey, 1989) survey sponsored by the American Council on Education supplied the data base for

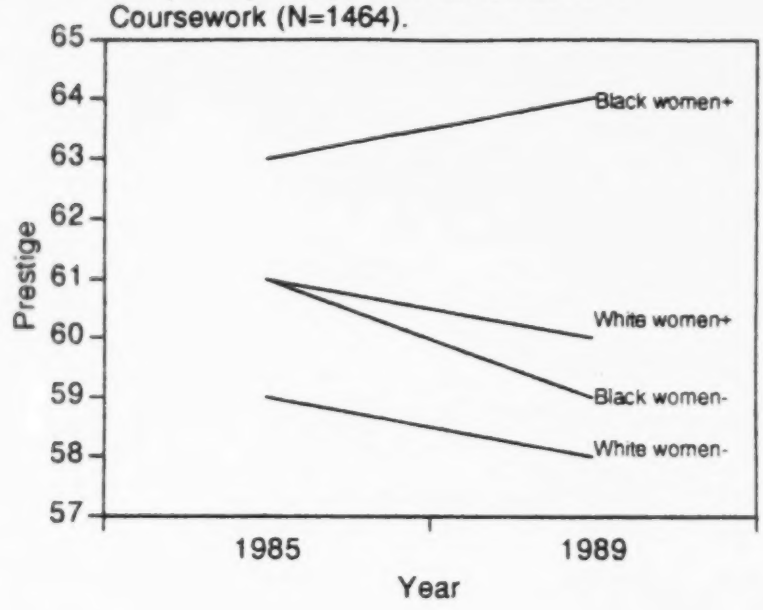
this study. Students completed an initial survey upon entering college in 1985 which is administered during registration, freshman orientation, or during the first few weeks of classes (1985). In August 1989, approximately four academic years later, a random sample of the same students completed a follow-up survey which asked the same questions as the initial survey and collected extensive information regarding the student's actual college experience.

White and black women students in coeducational colleges were sampled and matched on socioeconomic status. Given the small number of students from other ethnic groups in this national data base, sample size constraints dictated their omission in this study. The final sample includes 1464 women students, 1307 white women and 157 black women queried in 1985 and 1989.

RESULTS

As demonstrated by the analyses to follow, participation in Women's Studies coursework does significantly impact the occupational prestige aspirations differentially by race. Although the educational aspirations of white women participants in Women's Studies increase, the interaction effect is not significant. The analyses to follow address the main objective of the study: To describe significant differences between black and white women's aspirations relative to their participation in Women's Studies Coursework.

Figure 1. 2
Mean levels of occupational prestige scores, 1985-1989, for participants (+) and non-participants (-) in Women's Studies Coursework (N=1464).



Multivariate analyses for the career prestige measure (Figure 1.2) indicate that there is a strong interaction effect for career prestige by race by participation in Women's Studies Coursework, $F(1,1464)=5.75$, $p<.017$. As noted in Figure 1.2, black women participants in Women's Studies make substantial gains over other groups in the study, while the occupational aspirations of black non-participators decline. White women participants in Women's Studies enter college with higher prestige aspirations than white non-participants and there is no significant difference in aspirational decline over college. The strong significance of the between-subjects main effect for race, $F(1,1464)=11.21$, $p<.001$, demonstrates the strength of the differences in occupational aspirations between the races over college.

DISCUSSION

This study indicates that black women participants in Women's Studies find significant support for their occupational aspirations. Kuhn's theory regarding repressed groups may be the most relevant explanation of these results. Black women participants may enter Women's Studies courses having previously mapped society's areas of taken-for-granted beliefs. That is, their early experience with racial bias may provide 1) a more salient knowledge base from which to understand women's position in a hierarchical culture and, 2) a greater motivation to utilize this knowledge to improve their status. Consequently, black women participants combine knowledge with established coping skills, thus facilitating the pursuit of their goals in spite of institutional barriers. White women, on the other hand, attain adulthood without understanding that their socialization as women often inhibits their goals because their roles and responsibilities have multiplied relatively recently; and, the means to adopt their new societal position has not been adequately addressed either by their own development or the support of national policy.

This is of particular concern to educators because higher achieving women, in this case, white women, continue to enter and leave college without achieving in relation to their ability and preparation (Table 1.2).

Table 1.2.
Comparison of Mean High School GPA and Mean Number of Math and Sciences Courses by Race (N=1486).

HIGH SCHOOL ACHIEVEMENT	Black Women	White Women
High School GPA	2.4	3.1
No. of math courses	5.2	5.6
No. of science courses	3.3	3.7

The high school grade point average, mathematics and science preparation of white women in this student population is superior to that of black women. A simple analysis of variance (ANOVA) of high school grade point by race yielded a significant effect for race

$F(1,1464)=7.21$, $p<.01$. Effects for mathematics and science courses were not significantly different by race. Given equal mathematics and science preparation and better high school grades, these white college women do not fully utilize their college opportunities. Research indicates that socialization in the family, at school, and in society have negative affects on women's career development (Betz and Fitzgerald, 1987). Participation in Women's Studies coursework appears to moderate these effects for women differentially by race.

Other explanations have been offered for black women's achievement in college. Grant (1984) suggests that college-prepared black women have resisted socialization into race-gender roles, for example, serving others rather than developing one's own skills. Therefore, they are better prepared emotionally and psychologically to undertake the rigors of self development. Another explanation is associated with black women's lack of reliance upon marriage as an institution lending structure to their lives. A number of researchers (quoted by Tucker & Taylor, 1989) found that two key impediments to marriage among blacks are black male economic constraints and the sex-ratio imbalance. However, if these explanations were primary influencers on black women's aspirational choices, then it should follow that non-participators in Women's Studies should have fared better in maintaining their aspirations over college than they did.

In fact, education as a social process, has a large effect on individual social mobility (Kerckhoff, 1984). Women who understand the paradigm under which most educational curriculum is formulated and taught are more likely to sift unsupportive environmental queues and seek help from faculty in alternative environments like Women's Studies.

There are a number of other important observations to make about these data. Women with the highest aspirations appear to be seeking more information about the female experience as seen by their choice to enroll in Women's Studies coursework. The 1985 career aspirations of both black and white women in Women's Studies are between 7 and 9 percent higher than in the general population of women. This suggests that women whose attitudes are not so tightly

bound by cultural expectations can benefit more directly from opportunities to understand and appreciate women's experience thus facilitating the maintenance of their ability-appropriate choices of high prestige careers.

These data also suggest that women with higher aspirations may be looking to Women's Studies to provide female faculty role models unavailable in their major areas of study. Colleges still hire inadequate numbers of female faculty, especially within higher prestige majors (U.S. Department of Education, 1989). Women's Studies provides the opportunity for young women to make associations with female faculty. A number of studies have found that faculty role models are a particularly important influence on undergraduate women's aspirations (Esposito, Hackett, & O'Halloran, 1987; Ridgeway, 1978; Stake, 1981; Almquist & Angrist, 1972; Burlin, 1976; Douvan, 1976; Psathas, 1968; Tangri, 1972). Stake and Noonan (1985) found that after controlling for initial aspirations, the greatest gains in educational aspirations during the freshman year occurred for those students who chose a same-gender faculty role model they wished to emulate.

Although the interaction effect for educational aspirations was not significant, white women enrolling in Women's Studies were more apt to increase their educational aspirations than other groups. This suggests that white women participants do act upon the knowledge gained in Women's Studies. However, white women apparently view social mobility as something to be reached/achieved through education rather than through obtaining a high prestige career. One obvious reason for these women's preference for education may well be that many traditionally "women's" careers are not adequately valued by patriarchal societies and thus, fall in the medium or lower prestige ranges. These college women may be planning prestigious careers but within a lower status slice of the labor market.

REFERENCES

Almquist, E. M., and Angrist, S.S., (1971). Role model influences on college women's career aspirations. Merrill Palmer Quarterly of Behavior Development , 17, 273-279.

Baruch, G. Barnett, R. and Rivers, C. (1983). Life Prints: New Patterns of Love and Work for Today's Women. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company.

Betz, N.E. & Fitzgerald, L.F. (1987). The Career psychology of women. New York: Academic Press, Inc.

Brown, D., Brooks, L. and Associates (1985). Career Choice and Development. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc.

Burlin, F. D. (1976). The relationship of parental education and maternal work and occupational state to occupational aspirations in adolescent females. Journal of Vocational Behavior, 9, 99-104.

Chamberlain, M. (1988). Enriching the curriculum: Women's studies. The NEA Higher Education Journal IV, 2, 24.

Douvan, E. (1976). The role of models in women's professional development. Psychology of Women Quarterly, 1(1), 5-20.

Esposito, D., Hackett, G., & O'Halloran, S. (1987, May). The relationship of role model influences to the career salience and educational and career plans of college women. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Washington, DC.

Grant, L. (1984). Black females' "place" in desegregated classrooms. Sociology of Education, 57, 98-111.

Healy, C. (1982). Career Development: Counseling through the Life Stages. Boston, Mass. Allyn & Bacon.

Henley, N. M. & Bartle, K.M. (1987). Is there life after Women's Studies? Women's Studies graduates evaluate a program in relation to their current lives. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the National Women's Studies Association, Atlanta, Georgia.

Howe, F. (1983). The power of education. Women's Studies in the Curriculum (p.24). Winston-Salem, NC: Salem College.

Hurtado, S., Astin, A., Korn, W. & Dey, E. (1989). The American College Student. Higher Education Institute, University of California, Los Angeles.

Janeway, E. (1975). Women on campus: The unfinished liberation. In Change Magazine (Eds.) Women on Campus (p. 27). New York.

Kerckhoff, A.C. (1984). The current state of social mobility research. Sociological Quarterly , 25(2), pp.139-153.

Kramer, L. (1991). The Sociology of Gender. St. Martin's Press: New York.

Kuhn, T.S. (1962). The Structure of Scientific Revolutions. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Pascarella, E.T. (1984). College environmental influences on students' educational aspirations. Journal of Higher Education, 55(6), 751-771.

Psathas, G. (1968). Toward a theory of occupational choice for women. Sociology and Social Research, 52, 253-268.

Ridgeway, C. (1978). Parental identification and patterns of career orientation in college women. Journal of Vocational Behavior, 12, 1-11.

Sarbin, T. R. (1954). Role theory. In G.Lindzey (Ed.), The Handbook of Social Psychology. Vol. I (pp. 223-258). Cambridge, Mass.: Addison-Wesley.

Siegel, P. (1971). Prestige in the American Occupational Structure, Ph.D. Dissertation. University of Chicago; Chicago, Illinois.

Stake, J. (1981). Promoting leadership behaviors in low performance self-esteem women in task-oriented mix-sex dyads. Journal of Personality, 49, 401-414.

Stake, J.E. and Noonan, M. (1985). The influence of teacher models on the career confidence and motivation of college students. Sex Roles, 12, 1023-1031.

Stevens, J. (1986). Applied multivariate statistics for the social sciences. Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Stimpson, C.R. (1986) Women's Studies in the United States. A Report to the Ford Foundation, Office of Reports, New York: Ford Foundation.

Tangri, S. S. (1975). Determinants of occupational role innovation among college women. Journal of Social Issues, 28, 177-199.

Tidball, M. E. (1980). Women colleges and women achievers revisited. Signs:Journal of Women in Culture and Society , 5(3), 504-517.

Tucker, M.B. & Taylor, R.J. (1989) Demographic correlates of relationship status among black Americans, Journal of Marriage and the Family, 51 (August) 655-665.

U.S. Department of Commerce (1989). Statistical Abstract of the U.S. (109th ed.). Washington, DC: Bureau of the Census.

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (1989). Surveys: Fall enrollment in colleges and universities, and Faculty and professional staff in institutions of higher education.

Zuckerman, D. M. (1981). Self-esteem, personal traits and college women's life goals. Journal of Vocational Behavior, 17(3), 310-319.